Proclamations

By

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Abstract

This is a philosophical-theological reflection and discussion on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 8, Year A, 28 June 2026): Genesis 22:1-14 (the Akedah), Romans 6:12-23, and Matthew 10:40-42. The reading is anchored in Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* — whose category of ultimate concern carries the existentialist underpinnings into the text — and works the classical Problem of Evil that the Akedah forces. Its ontological basis, in the strict sense, is the gradation-of-being framework received from Plato, Augustine, Aristotle, and Aquinas, with two definite commitments. First, with Aristotle's *energeia* and Aquinas's *actus* read process-wise, being itself is identified with the activity — a position that diverges from the strict substance metaphysics both Aristotle and Aquinas hold. Second, essence is given by creation and precedes existence — the activity that is being is the actualization of an already-given nature, the image of God in which we are created — a position that diverges from the existentialist commitment, essential to Sartre, that existence precedes essence. On this footing the discussion holds open a graded structure of Christian existence, ordered as approximation in Plato's sense: as things in this world are, for Plato, to the extent they approximate the Forms, so we have being-as-proclamation to the extent we approximate the Word. Becoming and transformation — interchangeable with healing and with living into our baptism — name the ordinary motion of this approximation: the iterated activity by which we actualize the nature given, more or less fully, where we mostly are. Transfiguration names the actualization of our divine nature — disclosure of the Divine nature that we are in His image, the act on which the text turns at its climax (the liturgical proper of the Feast of the Transfiguration uses this word in place of *transformation* for the same reason). The result of transfiguration is fullness of being — fully actualized nature, joined with God in the state of fully actualizing our divine nature — which is what it is to be a living proclamation of the Word, as the discussion surfaces in the parenthetical that names the identity at the decisive moment: living proclamations of the Word, in our becoming who God created us to be. At this terminus the identity is exact: to be a proclamation is to be proclaiming, the being is the activity; in the ordinary case, we approximate. The classical tradition has located fullness of being chiefly in the life to come; the discussion holds, with hesitation, that it can be happening here and now where transfiguration is real, honoring the eschatological tension without collapsing it. The discussion proposes that to make God our ultimate concern is to make God-in-us and God-in-all-we-encounter our ultimate concern: one ultimate, three locations. Sin, in the inherited Greek-Thomist sense, names privation of being — cessation of the activity that is the being, failure to actualize the nature given, motion away from the Word approximated — and is its own wage. John Donne's *Meditation XVII* supplies the ontology of human interrelation; the prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi supplies the grammar of the turn, by which dying-to-self is being-born-to-life. The central claim is that Christian existence is the iterated act of becoming a living proclamation of the Word, and that sight, sacrifice, and service are one act, given and received.

Abstract by
Perplexity Computer
in conversation with The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland
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Preface

In his book entitled Dynamics of Faith Paul **Tillich** claims:

> "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern. Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his very existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns – cognitive, aesthetic, social, political. Some of them are urgent, often extremely urgent, and each of them as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. If it claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name. … . But it is not only the unconditional demand made by that which is one's ultimate concern, it is also the promise of ultimate fulfillment which is accepted in the act of faith. … . In each of these cases it is "ultimate fulfillment" that is promised, and it is exclusion from such fulfillment which is threatened if the unconditional demand is not obeyed. An example – and more than an example – is the faith manifest in the religion of the Old Testament. It also has the character of ultimate concern in demand, threat and promise. … . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6:5). This is what ultimate concern means and from these words the term "ultimate concern" is derived. They state unambiguously the character of genuine faith, the demand of total surrender to the subject of ultimate concern. … . Faith, for the men of the Old Testament, is the state of being ultimately and unconditionally concerned about Jahweh and about what he represents in demand, threat, and promise.
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> Another example – almost a counter-example, yet nevertheless equally revealing – is the ultimate concern with "success" and with social standing and economic power. It is the god of many people in the highly competitive Western culture and it does what every ultimate concern must do: it demands unconditional surrender to its laws even if the price is the sacrifice of genuine human relations, personal conviction, and creative *eros*. Its threat is social and economic defeat, and its promise – indefinite as all such promises – the fulfillment of one's being." (pp 1-3)
>
> Faith is a total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite, and ultimate concern. … . …, the ultimate concern is about what is experienced as ultimate. In this way we have turned from the subjective meaning of faith as a centered act of the personality to its objective meaning, to what is meant in the act of faith. (pp 9-10).

Paraphrasing **Tillich**, Ultimate concern is the centered act of the personality through which one believes. The ultimate itself is that toward which the centered act is directed, the faith which is believed. (p. 10) Continuing with **Tillich**:

> "The ultimate of the act of faith and the ultimate that is meant in the act of faith are one and the same. This is symbolically expressed by the mystics when they say that their knowledge of God is the knowledge God has of himself; and it is expressed by Paul when he says (I Cor. 13) that he will know as he is known, namely, by God. God never can be object without being at the same time subject. Even a successful prayer is, according to Paul (Rom. 8), not possible without God as Spirit praying within us. … .
>
> In the act of faith that which is the source of this act is present beyond the cleavage of subject and object. It is present as both and beyond both."(p.11).

One's ultimate concern is the organizing principle of one's being, one's life. It is that through which all things are seen – ascribed meaning, that for the sake of which all acts are committed, and the means by which those acts are committed.

Last week I asked " What is it to be alive to God in Christ?" Then, I noted We have at least part of the answer in the Gospel, "Whoever love father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." But what does this mean? At least one thing seems clear, namely, first things first and God is first.

What, then, is it to make God first in our Lives? It is to die to serving self or anything else other than God as our ultimate end – that which is done for its own sake and for no other reason and provides unity to all our endeavors – and being born to life by living to serve God, (e.g., serving God being the ultimate end in itself, our, as Tillich says, ultimate concern). It is to die to sin – separating ourselves from God by placing other things above God, having serving ourselves or our mother or our father, son or daughters or anything else other than God as our ultimate end; and, living to God by making serving Him our ultimate end.

Notably, in the Old Testament reading for last week we have an example of this, namely, Abraham sending His son and his mother away. By the way, what do you think of Sarah's request that he do this? What about God's telling Abraham to honor her request? Note, however, God provided for Abraham's son. And in the Old Testament reading for today we have yet another, and somewhat baffling, and more powerful example of this in Abraham's sacrificing His son Isaac to God, in obedience to God.

We are first to love God, to do His will, "Thy will not mine be done." This entails we live "Thy will not mine be done" even when His will seems and/or is not what we might think it is, or when His will and what we want conflict. Thy will, not mine, be done! Perhaps a better way to look at this, is may Thy will be mine. For out of love for Him we strive to make His will ours, His will that we love each other as we are loved by Him ours, regardless of the sacrifice, to thus submit our will to His.

But wait! Problem of Evil: Why, then does God allow bad things happen to people? This is the classical "Problem of Evil." How can there be evil? For if God is all-powerful, He could prevent it; and, it would seem that if He were all-good, then He would prevent it. Whence, then, evil? How, then, is it He would command Abraham to sacrifice (murder?) his son? Let us consider the story of Abraham and Isaac more closely:

> God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, **"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. **Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.** When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. **He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.** But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, **"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you <u>fear</u> God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."** And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place **"<u>The LORD will provide</u>";** as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Would you sacrifice your only son, your granddaughter? Notably Abraham tells Isaac, **"God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."**

In any case, making God first in our lives involves each of us taking up the cross and following Christ. Following Christ entails doing as He did, and serving others. Serving others involves making all others – including son, grandmother, etc. - welcome in our lives. ***FOR TO MAKE GOD OUR ULTIMATE CONCERN IS TO MAKE GOD IN US AND ALL WE ENCOUNTER OUR ULTIMATE CONCERN AND THUS EACH OTHER OUR ULTIMATE CONCERN!*** *And each time we make others welcome in our lives we are at once accepting Christ in our lives, (e.g., as we did in Baptism dying to sin, to placing anything else other than serving God as our ultimate end, and living to God, reconciling with Him, joining Him through Christ),* ***and,*** *proclaiming the good news, (e.g., that all can do the same and find life in Christ). For God turns no one away. This is the Good News which we are called to proclaim in our everydayness, (e.g., at work, with friends, etc.) by how we are in the world.*

And nothing but life itself here and now hangs in the balance of our living to God by taking up our cross and following Christ. For, when we live to God, defining our being in the world by making serving Him in Christ our ultimate end, which is to say, when we take up our cross and follow Christ, serving God through service to others as He did - making Christ our sure foundation and others' sure foundation by serving them – we become like Christ thus fulfilling our nature and live. When we do not do this by, for example, by making ourselves our ultimate end, saving our lives our ultimate end we do not become like Christ, and do not fulfill our nature and die. And so we have, " **<u>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.</u>".**

On Faith

[How, then are we to do this? In a word, FAITH. Saint Paul tells us in Hebrews 11:1, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Another translation is "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." But what does this mean? At Hebrews 11:8-12, Saint Paul tells us that:

> "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of **heaven** and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."

What is in common with all these examples is what seems not possible comes to pass. Sarah is barren, yet she has a son. And it was Abraham's faith in God, his acting on that faith out of love for God, despite evidence to the contrary that makes this possible. Faith, for Abraham was His evidence for things not seen and thus the substance (basis) of things hoped for.]]]

Often we, when attempting to make God's will ours we can come to believe that we have failed because the result does not look like what we expected. Or, we can be so assured of what we think the result should be that we mistake our wants and desires for His will. Or, we can simply ask that His will be ours, please God …. . Or, finally, we can come to believe that we need only run on our will having no need of God. We do not ask what is His will for us is but rather how we can have our own will be done. And we live outside His Kingdom. We turn from God running on our will and not His. We submit not to Him from whom all good things flow and instead submit to ourselves. We do not live to God but rather to ourselves.

And we forget:

- that by our submission to God by drawing near to Him through service to others that God through others will draw near to us >and we will through our interaction with each other, see and feel the reward of living to God by the Word, and naturally will want to affirm and proclaim the Word by living the Word.
- We forget that by thus proclaiming the Word we rid ourselves of the stumbling blocks that get in ours' and others' way of reconciling with God. For in so acting we reconcile with God through each other.
- We forget that we will thus be living to God as opposed to living to ourselves and in so living we find the blessing of His Grace working in and through us, the grace of His Spirit, the Holy Spirit in each of us.
- We forget that in caring for each other we become one in the Spirit, one in the Lord.
- And we forget, as the hymn goes, they will know we are Christians by our love, our love for God born out in our love for each other, and in abiding in that love, His love for us through

us by the Holy Spirit in following the Word, we become partakers of His **heaven**ly **treasure**s here and now.
- We forget, that in so doing, we live in and bring the Kingdom to all we encounter.

And when we forget and therefore believe that we have failed to do His will when the result of our action is not what we expect it to be, we have lost sight of the fact that anytime we offer another a drink that we are proclaiming His Word, doing His will, lost sight of the fact that anytime a person offers another a drink of water they are carrying the message, proclaiming the Word. And we lose sight because we have lost faith, faith in His Spirit in us guiding us. And unlike Abraham, we do not do what we cannot see as possible for we no longer have evidence of things not seen and assurance of thing hoped for, and we go astray.

But we can by faith find our way again, by faith in His Spirit, the Holy Spirit in us, guiding us to do all things that are right.

Our orientation to God, our being to God, having following Christ our Ultimate Concern is made manifest in act, in our sacrifice of our lives to God, giving ourselves to Him as He gives Himself to us in Christ. We, the church, are the body of Christ in the world today**.** It is, then, to making our live a living manifestation of the saving nature of God's love in Christ – to ministry - that we are **all** called. And it is in answering that call by making our lives a living manifestation of the saving nature of God's love in Christ, by making ourselves vehicles through which that inward and spiritual grace works in our and the lives of others, through us healing others, that we become fully who we are by nature in Christ, that we are healed, healed by thus reconciling with God through our reconciling with each other. **I, you, we are healed by letting the saving nature of God's love in Christ to work through ourselves to heal others.** And it is in so doing, that we are **transformed** into who we are by nature and we see Christ at work in and through our lives, in and through our being, that we see fully Christ at work in our lives. **Fully seeing Christ at work in our lives comes by our transformation into *LIVING PROCLAMATIONS OF THE WORD, (i.e., IN OUR BECOMING WHO GOD CREATED US TO BE)*!**

God calls us to reconciliation with Him through Christ. If we answer that call by seeing the saving nature of His love for us in Christ at work in our lives today and **act** on what we see, sacrificing our lives to God, **we are healed in the sacrifice,** by so being transformed into who we are by nature, the divine nature of God in Christ in us. If we answer God's call in Christ and turn and follow Him forgiving and loving ourselves and others, giving ourselves to others as God in Christ gave Himself to us, we not only see and hear Christ in our lives, we feel and live in Christ, reconciling and joining with God in Christ, living in and sharing in the Divine. **By so reconciling and joining with each other we are transfigured by His love in Christ into the Divine nature that we are in His image, and we live, we are.**

But, again, often we fall short. We live to ourselves and not God. We close ourselves off from seeing and living on the basis of the saving nature of God's love in Christ. Further, when we are wronged by others we often develop resentments against those who have wronged us for having done so. We judge them – usually negatively – and often look down on them. On the other hand

sometimes when we wrong others we do the same, developing resentments towards ourselves, judge ourselves, look down on ourselves.

What we often tend not to do is forgive, forgive ourselves and others as God in Christ forgives us. And this again is a symptom of where our heart is – our orientation – ourselves and not God, living to ourselves and not God. And in not forgiving we pay a price. For when we do not forgive others and ourselves we cut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. We cut ourselves off from the saving nature of God's love in Christ. By not forgiving others we get in the way of our ability to love others, to be manifestations of the sunlight of the Spirit, to be living expressions of the saving nature of God's love in Christ. By not forgiving ourselves or not accepting the forgiveness of others we cut ourselves off from receiving the sunlight of the Spirit, the saving nature of God's love in Christ through others. **By not grounding our lives in unconditionally loving others as we are unconditionally loved by Him who is the sunlight of the world, forgiving and accepting forgiveness of others, we cut ourselves off from that light, the saving nature of the love of God in Christ. And we die, we are not.**
For, as John Donne reminds us:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

We fail to carry out the mission of the Church, the mission of the Body of Christ in the world today, our mission. Yet we can persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of His Name. And what is our mission, that to which God in Christ calls us to do?

Mission

This is the mission of the church of which Christ is the cornerstone and we, the church His body here and now, our mission is to <u>bring the kingdom of God to all we encounter</u> by living to God as opposed to ourselves. And this is to bring the message of love, and forgiveness and inclusion, to all we encounter, by acts of forgiveness etc. Only when we do this do we fully experience the kingdom of God in our lives here and now. It is only when we do this that we feel the warmth of the Sunlight of His Spirit abiding in us, shining forth to us through each other by our proclamation of His Word in what we do, proclaiming the Good News of Salvation, of His unconditional love and forgiveness to be found in Christ our sure foundation. [through each other, through our unconditionally forgiving and loving each otherso that we might bring the Kingdom which it is His good pleasure to give us to all we encounter].

But how do we do this? Through our orienting ourselves to God and pray as did Saint Francis.

Let us pray,

A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis

May God make us instruments of His peace:
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much
Seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. **Amen.**

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